



State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 2, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

Housing Committee Public Hearing

February 28, 2023

CHRO Testimony Regarding

HB 6781 – AA Addressing Housing Affordability for Residents in the State

HB 6633 – AAC a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities to Increase Affordable Housing

Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, Representative Scott, Senator Sampson, and members of the Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 6781 and HB 6633. My name is Tanya Hughes, and I am the executive director of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. I am joined by CHRO Deputy Director Cheryl Sharp.

HB 6781 – An Act Addressing Housing Affordability for Residents in the State

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) fully supports all legislative efforts to address the housing affordability crisis in this state. Housing is a primary human need and therefore, a civil and human rights issue. Without safe and adequate housing, individuals are unable to feed and provide for their families, go to work, and take care of their personal needs. Without a permanent residence, people are unable to register to vote, receive mail, set up bank accounts, or often, register children for school.

Sections 10 and 11 of this bill specifically relate to the CHRO. They add protections for individuals who have experienced evictions more than five (5) years prior to their application for housing, or who have otherwise been a party to a summary process action that did not result in eviction. Individuals who have experienced evictions are often excluded from housing opportunities. Landlords often assume that they are high risk tenants and choose to rent only to those without evictions on their records. However, by limiting the “look-back period” to the last five years, this bill balances the landlord’s interest in prompt rent receipts and the tenant’s interest in securing housing.

Evictions weigh more heavily on Black and Hispanic individuals and families. Nationally, there is a significant disparity in the eviction rates of White and Black residents.¹ Often, however, people are evicted because of circumstances beyond their control, such as illness, loss of a job, or even lapse of time of a lease where a landlord wants to raise the rent to a sum beyond their ability to pay. Eviction Lab tracks eviction rates and, since the expiration of the eviction moratorium that was in place due to COVID-19, eviction rates have dramatically increased.² This significantly impacts people already living in precarious financial situations. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development has identified many negative consequences of eviction on individuals and families, including loss of job opportunities, worsening physical and mental health, and the creation of a cycle where individuals experience more instability and insecurity in their lives.³

¹ [Racial and Gender Disparities among Evicted Americans \(evictionlab.org\)](https://evictionlab.org/racial-gender-disparities-among-evicted-americans/)

² [Connecticut | Eviction Tracking System \(evictionlab.org\)](https://evictionlab.org/connecticut-eviction-tracking-system/)

³ [Prevalence and Impact of Evictions | HUD USER](https://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/75001main.pdf)

As the state agency charged with enforcing the laws that prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, credit, and places of public accommodation, the CHRO believes that eliminating discrimination against those individuals with prior evictions is one more way to fulfill the agency's mission of establishing justice and equal opportunity for all individuals in the state.

It should be noted and corrected, however, that section 11(c) of the bill (line 497) states that a claim of discrimination should be filed with CHRO within 180 days of the refusal to rent. This timeframe was extended to 300 days for all other claims of discrimination by PA 21-109, and that should be consistent for this protected class as well.

While the CHRO is fully supportive of the intent of this section, the Housing Committee should be aware that the CHRO anticipates a high number of complaints to be filed on this basis and would request additional investigative staff to help process those complaints in a fair and timely manner.

The Commission appreciates the Housing Committee's willingness to address this important issue and urges it to pass HB 6781.

HB 6633 – An Act Concerning a Needs Assessment and Fair Share Plans for Municipalities to Increase Affordable Housing

The Commission also supports HB 6633 which takes a different approach to tackling segregated housing in Connecticut. The Fair Share system, which is successfully used in New Jersey, would change zoning regulations in towns to encourage the development of affordable housing. It would give towns and planning regions control over development but would require some degree of development of affordable housing.

The Commission is well aware of the grave impact individual town-based zoning statutes and regulations have had on the segregation of the residents of Connecticut. The Commission issued its Connecticut Zoning and Discrimination Report in 2021.⁴ The report focused on the discriminatory effects of zoning laws in Connecticut. Where one lives affects access to education, health care, services, food, jobs, and more. This legislation looks to change the way Connecticut towns have historically addressed where housing is located and who has the opportunity to live in it. By determining how much additional affordable housing Connecticut needs and allocating a fair portion to each region, a more thoughtful and cohesive plan can be constructed that will address the needs of the residents of Connecticut.

The Commission knows this is just the beginning. Comprehensive reform needs to take place not only in suburban areas, but in cities. Resources for affordable housing, access to food and services, education, and open space need to be made within our cities. Safe, affordable housing should be available to residents in their own communities; they should not be required to move to suburban areas to access it.

The Commission eagerly looks forward to working with the legislature and all the various stakeholders toward this life-changing goal. As the enforcement agency for the fair housing laws in Connecticut, the Commission holds a valuable perspective in assisting the legislature and agencies who will be implementing this statute with their goal of expanding affordable housing within Connecticut. The impact that zoning reform would have on our state and the people who live in it is beyond measure. By growing together, Connecticut will continue to show how we lead in providing the best housing opportunities for all.

⁴ [CHROs-Zoning-and-Discrimination-2021-Report.pdf \(ct.gov\)](https://www.ct.gov/chro/publications/CHROs-Zoning-and-Discrimination-2021-Report.pdf)